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Holmes, Oliver Wendell.
Grandmother's story of
Bunker-Hill Battle.

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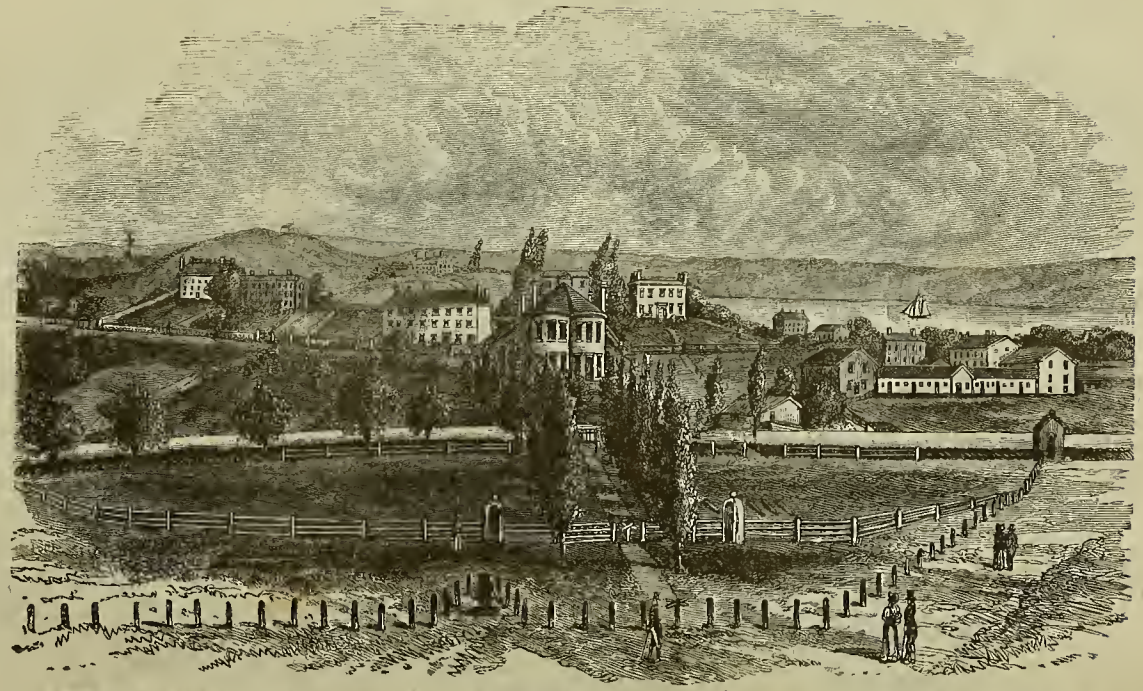

VIEW OF BUNKER HILL FROM THE NAVY YARD, BEFORE THE ERECTION OF THE MONUMENT, FROM A PAINTING MADE IN 1825.

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Grandmother's Story of Bunker-Hill Battle:

as she saw it from the belfry.

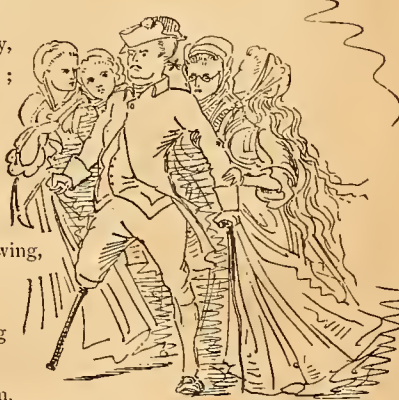
by oliver wendell holmes.

'Tis like stirring living embers when, at eighty, one remembers
All the achings and the quakings of "the times that tried men's souls;"
When I talk of *Whig* and *Tory*, when I tell the *Rebel* story,
To you the words are ashes, but to me they're burning coals.

I had heard the muskets' rattle of the April running battle;
Lord Percy's hunted soldiers, I can see their red coats still;
But a deadly chill comes o'er me, as the day looms up before me,
When a thousand men lay bleeding on the slopes of Bunker's Hill.

'Twas a peaceful summer's morning, when the first thing gave us warning
Was the booming of the cannon from the river and the shore:
"Child," says grandma, "what's the matter, what is all this noise and clatter?
Have those scalping Indian devils come to murder us once more?"

Poor old soul! my sides were shaking in the midst of all my quaking,
To hear her talk of Indians when the guns began to roar:
She had seen the burning village, and the slaughter and the pillage,
When the Mohawks killed her father with their bullets through his door.

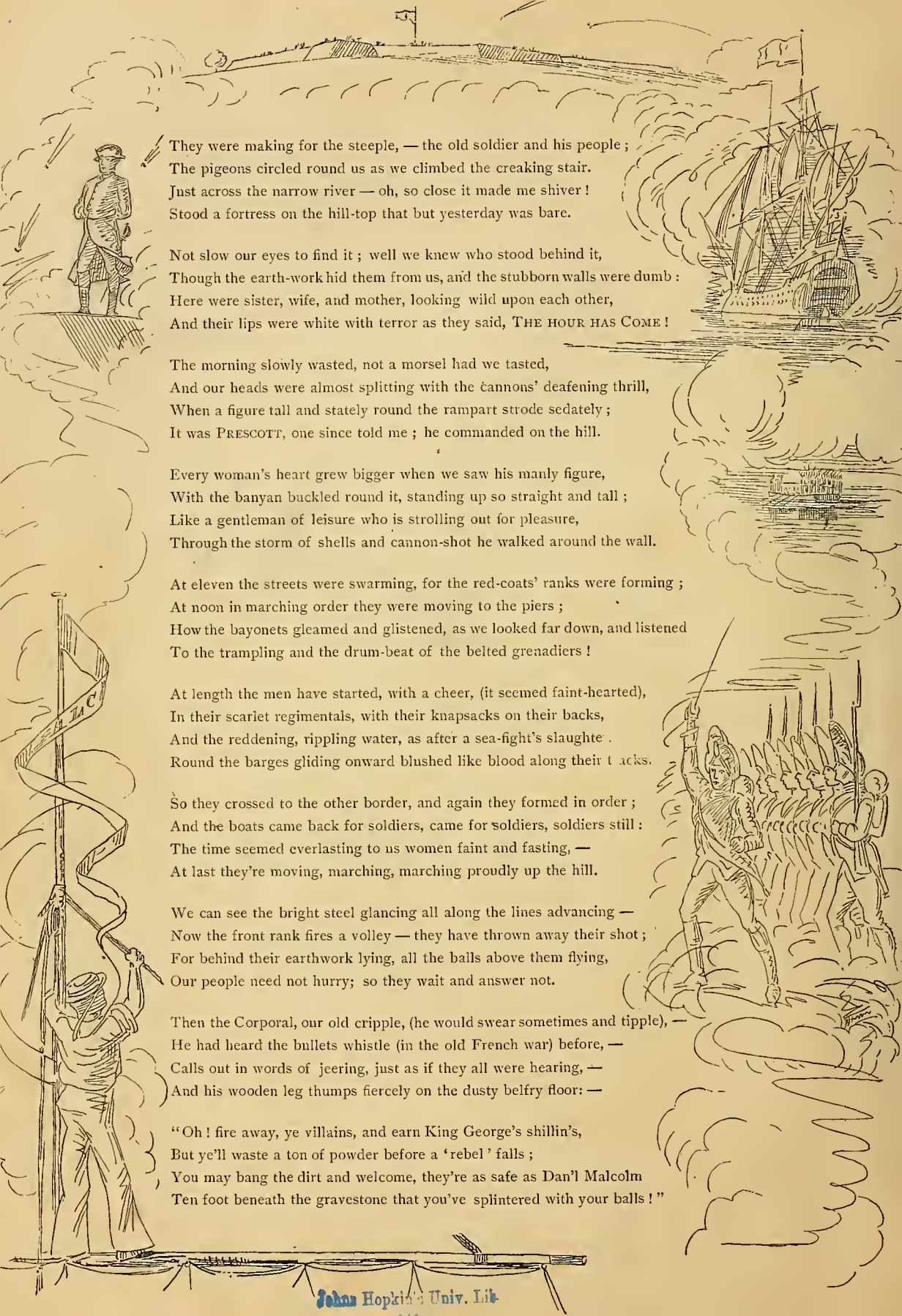


Then I said, "Now, dear old granny, don't you fret and worry any,
For I'll soon come back and tell you whether this is work or play;
There can't be mischief in it, so I won't be gone a minute"—
For a minute then I started. I was gone the live-long day.

No time for bodice-lacing or for looking-glass grimacing;
Down my hair went as I hurried, tumbling half-way to my heels;
God forbid your ever knowing, when there's blood around her flowing,
How the lonely, helpless daughter of a quiet household feels!

In the street I heard a thumping; and I knew it was the stumping
Of the Corporal, our old neighbor, on that wooden leg he wore,
With a knot of women round him,—it was lucky I had found him,
So I followed with the others, and the Corporal marched before.

[* As this Poem is written expressly for this Memorial, and not intended for publication elsewhere, the Publishers request that it be not copied or reprinted.]



They were making for the steeple, — the old soldier and his people ;
The pigeons circled round us as we climbed the creaking stair.
Just across the narrow river — oh, so close it made me shiver !
Stood a fortress on the hill-top that but yesterday was bare.

Not slow our eyes to find it ; well we knew who stood behind it,
Though the earth-work hid them from us, and the stubborn walls were dumb :
Here were sister, wife, and mother, looking wild upon each other,
And their lips were white with terror as they said, THE HOUR HAS COME !

The morning slowly wasted, not a morsel had we tasted,
And our heads were almost splitting with the cannons' deafening thrill,
When a figure tall and stately round the rampart strode sedately ;
It was PRESCOTT, one since told me ; he commanded on the hill.

Every woman's heart grew bigger when we saw his manly figure,
With the banyan buckled round it, standing up so straight and tall ;
Like a gentleman of leisure who is strolling out for pleasure,
Through the storm of shells and cannon-shot he walked around the wall.

At eleven the streets were swarming, for the red-coats' ranks were forming ;
At noon in marching order they were moving to the piers ;
How the bayonets gleamed and glistened, as we looked far down, and listened
To the trampling and the drum-beat of the belted grenadiers !

At length the men have started, with a cheer, (it seemed faint-hearted),
In their scarlet regimentals, with their knapsacks on their backs,
And the reddening, rippling water, as after a sea-fight's slaughte .
Round the barges gliding onward blushed like blood along their t acks.

So they crossed to the other border, and again they formed in order ;
And the boats came back for soldiers, came for soldiers, soldiers still :
The time seemed everlasting to us women faint and fasting, —
At last they're moving, marching, marching proudly up the hill.

We can see the bright steel glancing all along the lines advancing —
Now the front rank fires a volley — they have thrown away their shot ;
For behind their earthwork lying, all the balls above them flying,
Our people need not hurry; so they wait and answer not.

Then the Corporal, our old cripple, (he would swear sometimes and tipple), —
He had heard the bullets whistle (in the old French war) before, —
Calls out in words of jeering, just as if they all were hearing, —
And his wooden leg thumps fiercely on the dusty belfry floor: —

"Oh ! fire away, ye villains, and earn King George's shillin's,
But ye'll waste a ton of powder before a 'rebel' falls ;
You may bang the dirt and welcome, they're as safe as Dan'l Malcolm
Ten foot beneath the gravestone that you've splintered with your balls ! "

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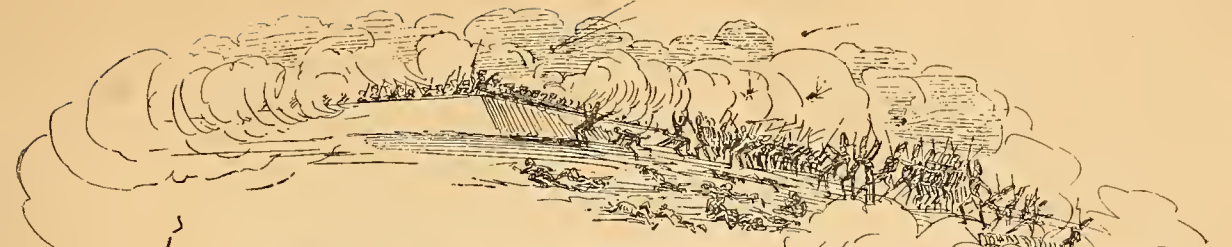


In the hush of expectation, in the awe and trepidation
Of the dread approaching moment, we are well nigh breathless all;
Though the rotten bars are failing on the rickety belfry railing,
We are crowding up against them like the waves against a wall.

Just a glimpse, (the air is clearer), they are nearer, — nearer, — nearer,
When a flash — a curling smoke-wreath — then a crash — the steeple shakes —
The deadly truce is ended; the tempest's shroud is rended;
Like a morning mist it gathered, like a thunder-cloud it breaks!

Oh the sight our eyes discover as the blue-black smoke blows over!
The red-coats stretched in windrows as a mower rakes his hay;
Here a scarlet heap is lying, there a headlong crowd is flying
Like a billow that has broken and is shivered into spray.

Then we cried, "The troops are routed! they are beat — it can't be doubted!
God be thanked, the fight is over!" — Ah! the grim old soldier's smile!
"Tell us, tell us why you look so?" (we could hardly speak, we shook so)
"Are they beaten? *Are* they beaten? ARE they beaten?"—"Wait a while."

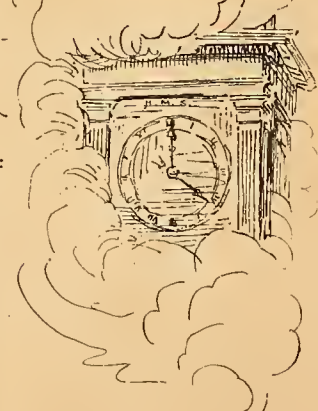
Oh the trembling and the terror! for too soon we saw our error:
They are baffled, not defeated; we have driven them back in vain;
And the columns that were scattered, round the colors that were tattered,
Toward the sullen silent fortress turn their belted breasts again.

All at once, as we are gazing, lo the roofs of Charlestown blazing!
They have fired the harmless village; in an hour it will be down!
The Lord in heaven confound them, rain his fire and brimstone round them,—
The robbing, murdering red-coats, that would burn a peaceful town!

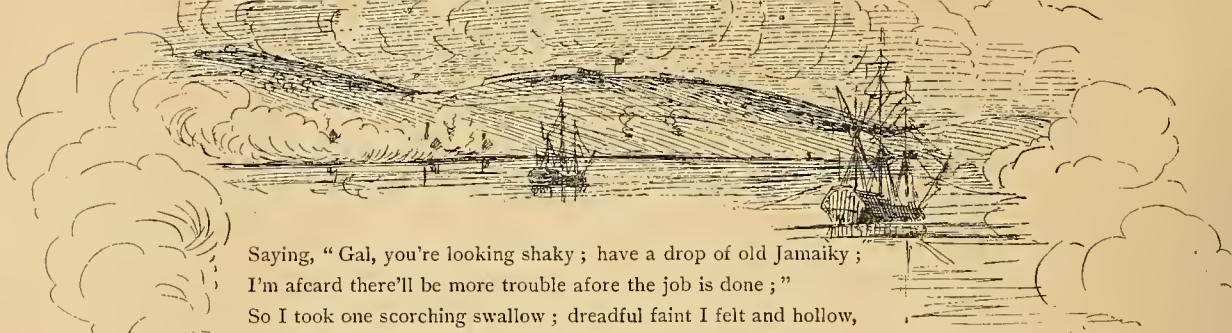
They are marching, stern and solemn; we can see each massive column
As they near the naked earth-mound with the slanting walls so steep.
Have our soldiers got faint-hearted, and in noiseless haste departed?
Are they panic-struck and helpless? Are they palsied or asleep?

Now! the walls they're almost under! scarce a rod the foes asunder!
Not a firelock flashed against them! up the earthwork they will swarm!
But the words have scarce been spoken, when the ominous calm is broken,
And a bellowing crash has emptied all the vengeance of the storm!

So again, with murderous slaughter, pelted backwards to the water,
Fly Pigot's running heroes and the frightened braves of Howe;
And we shout, "At last they're done for, it's their barges they have run for:
They are beaten, beaten, beaten; and the battle's over now!"



And we looked, poor timid creatures, on the rough old soldier's features,
Our lips afraid to question, but he knew what we would ask:
"Not sure," he said; "keep quiet, — once more, I guess, they'll try it —
Here's damnation to the cut-throats!" —— then he handed me his flask,



Saying, "Gal, you're looking shaky; have a drop of old Jamaiky;
I'm afeard there'll be more trouble afore the job is done;"
So I took one scorching swallow; dreadful faint I felt and hollow,
Standing there from early morning when the firing was begun.

All through those hours of trial I had watched a calm clock dial,
As the hands kept creeping, creeping, — they were creeping round to four,
When the old man said, "They're forming with their bagonets fixed for storming:
It's the death-grip that's a coming, — they will try the works once more."

With brazen trumpets blaring, the flames behind them glaring,
The deadly wall before them, in close array they come;
Still onward, upward toiling, like a dragon's fold uncoiling, —
Like the rattlesnake's shrill warning the reverberating drum!

Over heaps all torn and gory — shall I tell the fearful story,
How they surged above the breastwork, as a sea breaks over a deck;
How driven, yet scarce defeated, our worn-out men retreated,
With their powder-horns all emptied, like the swimmers from a wreck?

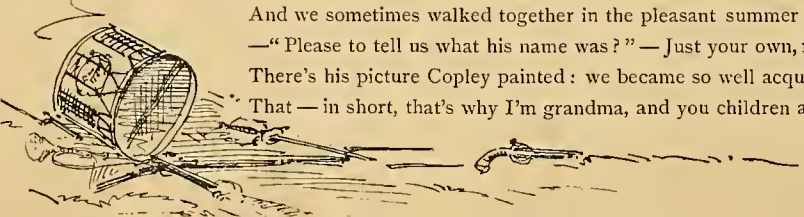
It has all been told and painted; as for me, they say I fainted,
And the wooden-legged old Corporal stumped with me down the stair.
When I woke from dreams affrighted the evening lamps were lighted, —
On the floor a youth was lying; his bleeding breast was bare.

And I heard through all the flurry, "Send for WARREN! hurry! hurry!
Tell him here's a soldier bleeding, and he'll come and dress his wound!"
Ah, we knew not till the morrow told its tale of death and sorrow,
How the starlight found him stiffened on the dark and bloody ground.

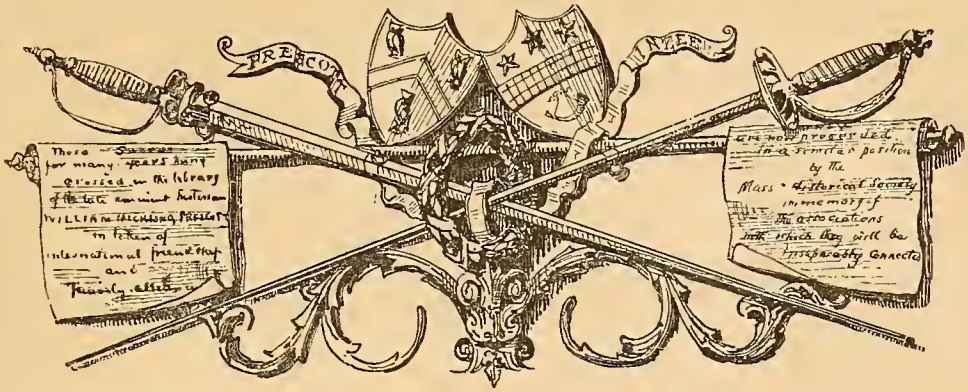
Who the youth was, what his name was, where the place from which he came was,
Who had brought him from the battle, and had left him at our door,
He could not speak to tell us; but 'twas one of our brave fellows,
As the homespun plainly showed us which the dying soldier wore.

For they all thought he was dying, as they gathered round him crying, —
And they said, "Oh how they'll miss him!" and, "What *will* his mother do?"
Then, his eyelids just unclosing like a child's that has been dozing,
He faintly murmured, "Mother!" —— and — I saw his eyes were blue.

— "Why grandma, how you're winking!" — Ah, my child, it sets me thinking
Of a story not like this one. Well, he somehow lived along;
So we came to know each other, and I nursed him like a — mother,
Till at last he stood before me, tall, and rosy-cheeked, and strong.



And we sometimes walked together in the pleasant summer weather;
—"Please to tell us what his name was?" — Just your own, my little dear, —
There's his picture Copley painted: we became so well acquainted,
That — in short, that's why I'm grandma, and you children all are here!



AFTER the retreat of the British from Concord and Lexington, on the 19th of April, the provincial militia closed in around Boston, and began to learn soldiering in earnest. The right wing of the "rebel" army rested at Roxbury and Jamaica Plain, under command of Gen. John Thomas; the centre at Old Cambridge, under command of Gen. Artemas Ward, the chief officer of the army; and the left, at Medford, Charlestown, and Chelsea, under command (apparently) of Gen. Israel Putnam. The returns, June 9, show a total force of 7,644 men.

To keep up the enthusiasm of the men, and gratify their desire to come in contact with the enemy, numerous expeditions were organized to attack the outposts, and seize the supplies of live-stock and hay which had been gathered on the islands in Boston Harbor. On the 27th of May, quite an important engagement took place on Noddle's Island, now East Boston, which the patriotic inhabitants of that locality desire to have recorded by the historian as the second battle of the Revolution. Col. Stark, who afterwards made his name famous at the battle of Bennington, was sent with a detachment of about three hundred men to drive the cattle and sheep from Noddle's and Hogg Islands across Chelsea Creek, which was fordable at low water. While engaged in executing their instructions, they were discovered by the guard of marines. The British admiral hoisted a red flag at the mainmast-head; and an armed schooner and sloop were sent up Chelsea Creek to cut off the return of the marauders. A force of grenadiers was sent to aid the marine guard on Noddle's Island; and Col. Stark was forced to retreat to Hogg Island (now Breed's), and thence to the mainland; but he succeeded in carrying off a large part of the live-stock. The schooner continued to fire at the provincials after they had drawn up on Chelsea Neck; and Gen. Putnam, who smelt the battle afar off, came up with re-enforcements, and opened a brisk fire in return. Being unable to get the schooner out of range, the crew were forced to abandon her, and she fell into the possession of the provincials,

VIEW OF THE BRITISH LINES ON BOSTON NECK.

with all her equipments and stores, — four six-pounders, twelve swivels, and some small-arms. Only three or four of the provincials were wounded. The loss of the British was greatly exaggerated at the time. Gage's official report states that "two men were killed, and a few wounded." "The New Hampshire Gazette," under date of June 2, 1775, reported

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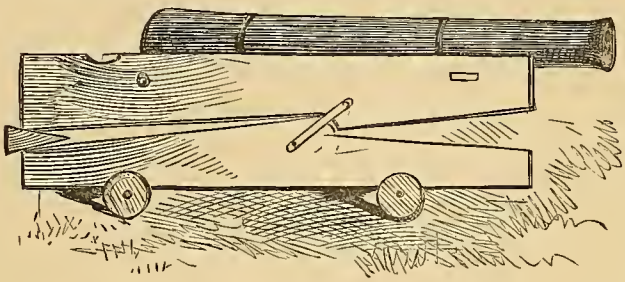
that "'Tis said between 2 and 300" [a safe way of putting it] "Marines and Regulars were Killed and Wounded, and that a place was dug in Boston twenty-five feet square to bury their dead." One man asserted that he saw sixty-four dead men landed at Long Wharf from one boat.

Thus Trumbull, in McFingal: —

"Nay, stern with rage grim Putnam boiling,
Plundered both Hogg and Noddle Island,
Scared troops of Tories into town,
Burned all their hay and houses down,
And menaced Gage, unless he'd flee,
To drive him headlong to the sea;
As once, to faithless Jews a sign,
The De'el, turned hog-reeve, did the swine."

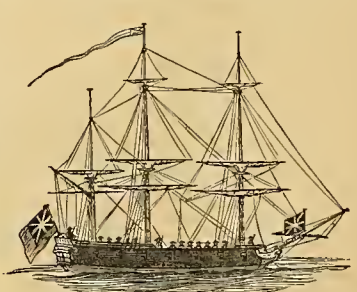


CANNON WITHOUT TRUNNIONS, USED BEFORE BOSTON.

In the latter part of May the British troops were reenforced by arrivals from England, by which their total force in Boston was increased to about ten thousand men. Howe, Clinton, and Burgoyne, three of the ablest and most experienced generals in his Majesty's service, arrived in "The Cerberus" on the 25th of that month. When Burgoyne was told that Boston was surrounded by the provincials, he said, "What! ten thousand peasants keep five thousand king's troops shut up! Let us get in, and we'll soon find elbow-room." Ever after, the general went by the name of "Elbow-room." With the arrival of these additions to his force, Gage determined to assume the offensive. As a preliminary, he issued a proclamation on the 12th of June, declaring martial law, and designating those who were in arms as rebels and traitors. Pardon was offered to such as should lay down their arms, excepting only Samuel Adams and John Hancock, whose offences were "of too flagitious a nature to admit of any other consideration than that of condign punishment."

On the 13th of June, the Committee of Safety at Cambridge received information that Gage proposed to occupy the heights at Dorchester (now Telegraph Hill, South Boston), and Bunker Hill in Charlestown. On the 15th, the committee resolved that it was important to the safety of the colony that Bunker Hill should be occupied, and securely kept and defended; and the Council of War was accordingly recommended to post sufficient forces there. The question of occupying Dorchester Heights was left to the discretion of the council.

On the 16th of June, the provincial commanders proceeded to act on this recommendation. A part of the Massachusetts regiments, under the command of Cols. Prescott, Frye, and Bridge, numbering about nine hundred men, a detachment of two hundred Connecticut men, and Capt. Gridley's company of artillery, containing forty-nine men with two field-pieces, were ordered to parade at six o'clock in the evening on Cambridge Common, provided with intrenching tools, packs, and blankets, and with provisions for twenty-four hours. The troops being assembled and drawn up in order, Pres. Langdon of Harvard College made a prayer. The detachment was placed under the command of Col. William Prescott of Pepperell, in Middlesex County; and at nine o'clock it began the march toward Charlestown Neck, headed by two sergeants carrying dark-lanterns. Some of the men wore a simple uniform:



THE "GLASGOW" FRIGATE.

others were dressed in their Sunday suit of homespun cloth. Their guns were of different patterns and sizes. Some had cartridge-boxes: others carried their ammunition in the old-fashioned powder-horns and pouches. Col. Prescott wore a three-cornered hat, and a linen blouse described by some of his men as a "banyan."

Thackeray begins his story of "The Virginians" with these words: "On the library wall of one of the most famous writers of America, there hang two swords, which his relatives wore in the great war of Independence. The one sword was gallantly drawn in the service of the king: the other was the weapon of a brave and honored republican soldier." The royalist was Capt. Linzee, commander of "The Falcon" sloop-of-war that cannonaded the works on Breed's Hill: the republican was this same Col. Prescott, now on his way to throw up the works on Breed's Hill; and the library was that of the historian, — William Hickling Prescott. The swords now hang on the walls of the Massachusetts Historical Society's library.

The men were not aware of their destination until they reached the Neck. The strictest silence was maintained in order not to alarm the enemy. At Bunker Hill they halted, and a consultation was held among the officers. Col. Richard Gridley, the chief engineer of the provincial army, and a veteran of the French wars, was present to mark out the lines of the intended fortifications. Gen. Putnam, who had joined the expedition at some point on the march, was also present.

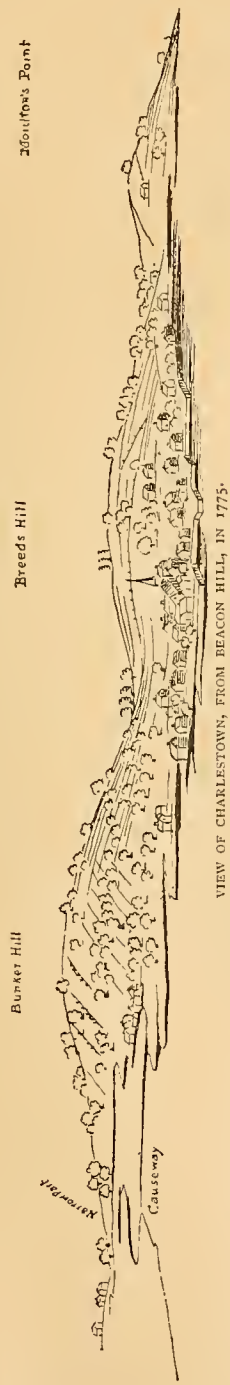
PLAN OF THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL, JUNE 17, 1775, FROM LOSSING.

Col. Prescott, in a letter to John Adams, then attending the Continental Congress at Philadelphia, states that he received orders to march to Breed's Hill. Most of the officers were in favor of taking position at Bunker Hill, as being the safer and more commanding of the two; but the urgency of one officer carried the councils; and Col. Gridley proceeded to give the lines for a redoubt, on the summit of Breed's Hill, distant about three miles, by the travelled way, from Cambridge Common. The accompanying plan shows, with substantial correctness, the topography of the peninsula and its surroundings, and the position of the fortifications.

THIS PLAN AND PICTURE OF THE BATTLE OF BUNKER HILL IS TAKEN FROM AN ORIGINAL MAP IN THE POSSESSION OF THE PUBLISHERS, WHICH WAS PUBLISHED IN LONDON, IN SEPTEMBER, 1775.

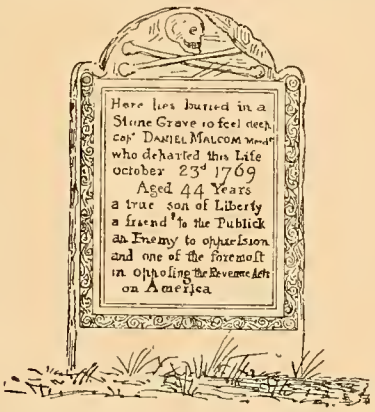
It was "nearly twelve o'clock," according to the report of the Committee of Safety, "before the works were entered upon." It was a kind of work (i.e., the use of the spade and pick-axe) to which most of the men were accustomed; and the energy with which it was prosecuted soon gave an astonishing result. It was a clear starlight night. Twice before dawn, Prescott went down to the shore, where he had posted a few men to prevent a surprise. As the hours struck, he could hear the prolonged cry of "All's well!" from the enemy's guards, and could see in the distance the black forms of the British men-of-war, now peacefully reposing on their dimly-outlined shadows, but soon to be rocked by the awakening of their dormant thunders.

"The Somerset," of sixty-eight guns, the largest of the ships, lay in the ferry-way, about in the line of the present Charles-river bridge; "The Lively," of twenty guns, lay off the present site of the Navy Yard; "The Falcon" (number of guns not given) lay off the north-eastern point of Charlestown; "The Symmetry" (a transport), of twenty guns, lay pretty well up towards the Neck, about on the line where the Boston and Maine Railroad passes between Charlestown and Somerville. "The Glasgow," of twenty guns, lay in the channel of the river east of Craigie's Bridge. Two floating-batteries were stationed during the forenoon near the present site of the State Prison. On Copp's-hill burial ground, at the North End of Boston, there was a battery of brass twenty-four pounders and howitzers, which faced to the north-west, about on the present line of Snowhill Street, and distant in a



VIEW OF CHARLESTOWN, FROM BEACON HILL, IN 1775.

straight line from the American redoubt, a little more than half a mile. Beneath "the king's artillery" there lay buried the remains of patriotic men, whose early teaching had led to this hostile array. To one true "son of liberty," whose epitaph is here inserted, and whose gravestone was vindictively made a target for musket-practice by the British soldiers, Dr. Holmes refers in his poem.


Here lies buried in a
Stone Grave to feel deep
cop^r Daniel Malcom who
who deharted this Life
october 23^d 1769
Aged 44 Years
a true son of Liberty
a frend to the Publick
an Enemy to oppreſsion
and one of the foremoſt
in oppoſing the Revenue Acts
on America

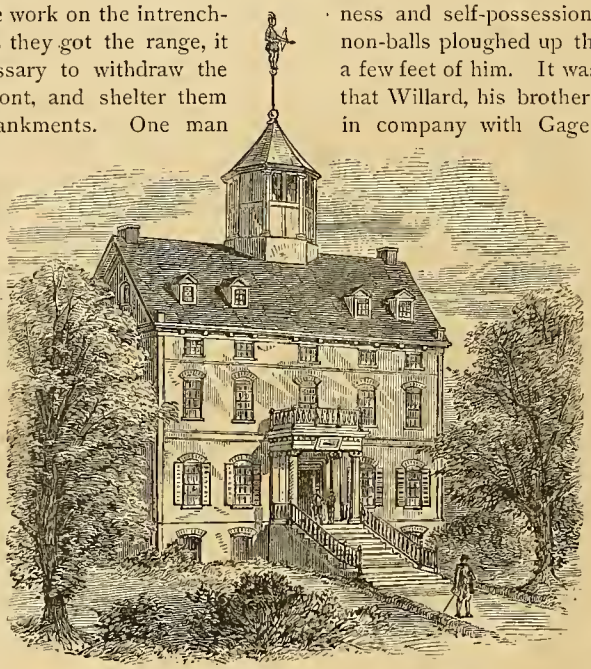
At break of day, the guard of marines on board "The Lively" saw rising on the height above them the form of an earthwork, which was being rapidly enlarged and strengthened. The alarm was instantly given; and in a few minutes the stillness of the summer morning was broken by the rapid discharge of heavy ordnance. The town and the surrounding country soon presented an animated appearance. The people clambered to the roofs of their houses, the steeples of the churches, or gathered on the hilltops, and anxiously scanned the movements of the hostile forces. The firing from "The Lively" was stopped for a time by order of Admiral Graves, but was soon resumed; the other vessels lying in the stream, and the Copp's-hill battery, taking part. A council of war was called by Gage; and it was decided to attack the "rebel" works in front, and carry them by assault. Clinton was for taking them in the rear by landing a force at the Neck, and thereby cutting off their retreat; but Gage rejected his advice, fearing that his troops would be caught between the American forces at Cambridge and the detachment on the peninsula. If Clinton's advice had been followed, and the movement supported by a naval force on the Mystic River, where vessels could haul in very near the Neck, we should have had a very different story to tell to-day. Gen. Ward was in such a state of apprehension for the safety of his centre, that he would probably have left the Charlestown detachment to surrender or die. It is somewhat surprising that the British commanders failed to send any naval force up the Mystic, where they could have raked the Neck so effectually as to have prevented the Americans from being re-enforced, or from retreating successfully. The fire from "The Glasgow" and "Symmetry," and the floating-batteries in Charles River, was at such long range, that it did not seriously interfere with the passage of troops across the Neck.

Soon after twelve o'clock. several regiments of grenadiers and light infantry embarked at Long Wharf in barges, and were landed, under cover of a heavy fire from the fleet, at Moulton's Point, about at the northerly end of the present rope-walk in the Navy-Yard. The boats were then sent back for another detachment, which was waiting at the north battery, — now Battery Wharf. The troops were in heavy marching-order, with three days' rations in their knapsacks. Major-Gen. William Howe (brother of Lord Howe)

had the chief command, Gen. Pigot being the next in rank. The two detachments first sent over numbered about two thousand men. After reconnoitring the works, Howe sent for re-enforcements; and about a thousand additional men, who had been held in readiness at Battery Wharf, were sent over, and landed at a point near the westerly end of the present Navy-Yard, whence they were to march directly for the redoubt.

During the morning, the Americans had been strengthening their works. The redoubt was about eight rods square, the front overlooking the village at the foot of the hill. The top of the parapet was about six feet from the level of the ground. Wooden platforms were placed on the inner sides for the men to stand upon while firing. A breastwork was carried from a point near the north-east corner, in the direction of the Mystic River, for a distance of about one hundred yards.

One small cannon was mounted in a corner of the redoubt, and fired a few times; but its shots were ineffective. The firing from the ships and batteries did not at first interfere seriously with the work on the intrenchments. Later, as they got the range, it was found necessary to withdraw the men from the front, and shelter them behind the embankments. One man was killed, and his comrades insisted on having the chaplain deliver a prayer before the body was committed to the earth; but Prescott put a peremptory stop to the proceedings, and then, to prevent a panic, mounted the parapet, and walked leisurely to and fro, inspecting the works, and giving his orders with perfect coolness and self-possession, while the cannon-balls ploughed up the ground within a few feet of him. It was at this moment that Willard, his brother-in-law, who was in company with Gage, inspecting the position from the Boston side, recognized him by the aid of a telescope, and pointed him out to the British governor. "Will he fight?" asked Gage. "To the last drop of his blood," was the reply.



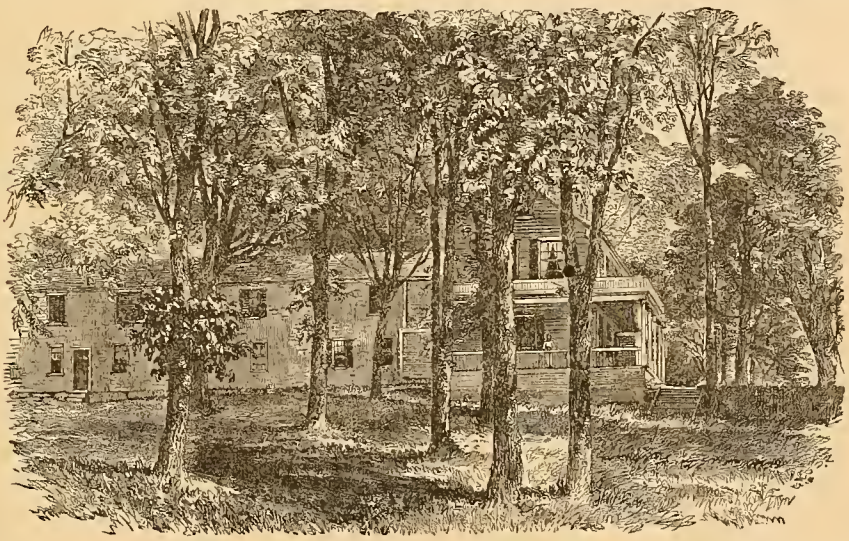
THE PROVINCE HOUSE, RESIDENCE OF GEN. GAGE.

Gen. Putnam, who had returned to Cambridge during the night, came back in the forenoon, and, seeing that the American position would soon be attacked, ordered the intrenching tools to be carried back to Bunker Hill for the purpose of throwing up breastworks there, and sent an urgent request to Cambridge for re-enforcements and provisions. Many of the men had neglected to take their rations as ordered, and were, consequently, suffering from lack of food, and from their severe labors. Moreover, the day was intensely hot, and it was difficult to obtain drinking-water. Private Peter Brown, writing to his mother a few days after the battle, took a very gloomy view of affairs at this stage. He says, "The danger we were in made us think there was treachery, and that we were brought here to be all slain. And I must and will venture to say there was treachery, oversight, or presumption in the conduct of our officers."

Prescott objected to send any of his men to Bunker Hill with the tools, saying they would not return; but Putnam assured him that they should. It turned out as Prescott predicted: the men seized the opportunity to make the best of their way back to Cambridge, leaving the tools at Bunker Hill to fall into the hands of the enemy.

To the urgent demands sent to Gen. Ward, early in the day, for re-enforcements, he assented only so far as to permit a portion of Stark's regiment of New Hampshire men to go forward, giving, as a reason for his refusal to furnish a larger number, that it would be unsafe to weaken his centre until the intentions of the enemy were more clearly revealed. When the landing was effected at Moulton's Point, Gen. Ward hastened to send a large part of his force to Charlestown ; but it does not appear that any considerable number crossed the Neck in season to take part in the fight. It is estimated that the number of the provincial troops assembled in Charlestown at this time was between fifteen hundred and two thousand.

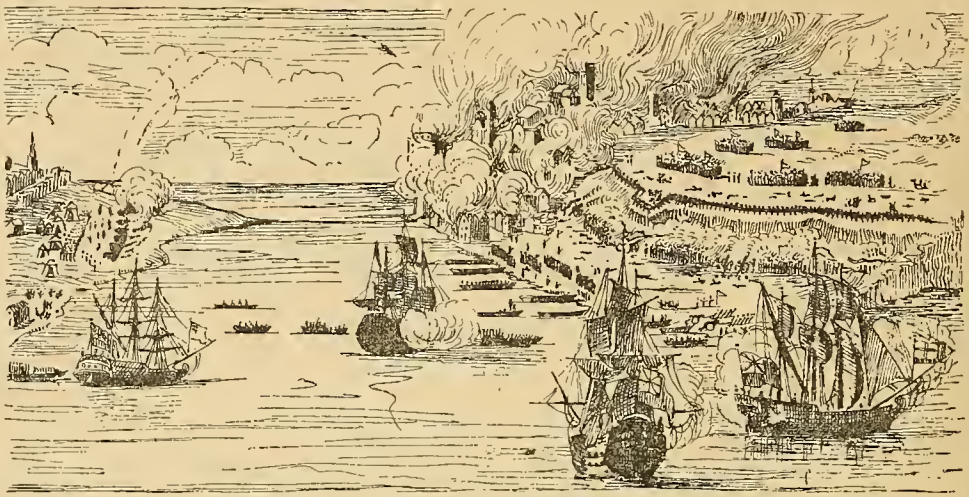
About eleven o'clock in the forenoon, " Doctor-General Warren," as the English called him, arrived at the redoubt. He had been elected major-general three days before, and had acted as presiding officer of the Provincial Congress at Watertown on the preceding day. Not having received his commission, he came with a musket, prepared to serve in the ranks. According to a statement made in 1843 by Needham Maynard, who says he acted as aide to Warren, the officers pressed him to assume command, saying, " We are all colonels here, and one colonel is as good as another." Warren then said, " If you will continue to act as



HOMESTEAD OF COL. PRESCOTT, AT PEPPERELL, MASS.

a council, I will give you my views as commander, and, if you approve of them, they can go as commands." This was assented to; and Maynard claims to have been the bearer of suggestions from Warren to the other officers, who received them as orders. This story is somewhat questionable. Putnam's admirers claim that he had the general command, although he did not interfere with Prescott at the redoubt. The most probable story is, that the men immediately around Warren took his orders when he chose to give any; that the general disposition of affairs at the redoubt and the breastwork was in the hands of Prescott, who originally had command of the whole detachment, and who had not been superseded ; and that Putnam controlled matters at the rail-fence (of which we shall presently have something to say), when he was not galloping to and fro between that point and the Neck. It does not appear from any of the official accounts that colors were borne by either side : but some of the survivors in their old age have imagined that they fought under a blue flag, quartered in one corner by the cross of St. George, the upper quartering next the staff bearing the representation of a pine-tree.

Between two and three o'clock, the British — having been re-enforced, as we have stated,



BATTLE OF BUNKER'S HILL, AND BURNING OF CHARLESTOWN, FROM A CURIOUS OLD PRINT.

by the landing of a detachment near the village of Charlestown — began to move on the American works. The left, under the command of Gen Pigot, was directed against the redoubt and the breastwork; the right, under Howe, moved along the margin of the Mystic, with an evident intention of flanking the American works. Prescott (some say Putnam), seeing this movement, detached a body of Connecticut infantry, and Capt. Gridley's artillery, with instructions to extend the lines to the shores of the Mystic, and prevent the left from being turned. They took up a position near the base of Bunker Hill, leaving a gap of twenty-five or thirty rods between their right and the northerly end of the breastwork; the left extending to the shore. The position was well chosen. There was a low stone wall in front of them, with rails mounted on the top. Other fences in the vicinity afforded materials for erecting a temporary structure just in front of, and parallel with, the wall. Into the space between the two, new-mown hay was thrown, furnishing quite an effective protection against infantry-fire. Col. Stark's men, on arriving, took position here; also Col. George Reed's regiment of New Hampshire men. Gen. Seth Pomeroy, an old soldier who had been in the French wars, joined these men, and, although superior in rank to Prescott, he carried a musket, and fought as a volunteer in the lines. His appearance was hailed with great enthusiasm. Many of the men were supplied with weapons of Pomeroy's manufacture; and a historian of the time says, "Had Vulcan himself supplied the Grecians with his celestial armor, and appeared in their ranks, they would not have been more certain of victory."

Just as the British movement began, it was discovered that the artillery had been supplied with balls too large for the guns. The pieces were then charged with grape; but the distance at which they were stationed, on account of the miry condition of the ground between Moulton's Hill and the intrenchments, rendered their fire for the time ineffective. As the extreme left of the British approached the village of Charlestown, it was annoyed by firing from the houses. Word was sent, or signal made (most probably the latter), to set the town on fire; and the mortar on Copp's Hill fired a carcass (a case filled with combustibles), which fell short. Another was fired, which took effect; and a detachment from "The Somerset," landing at the same time, set fire to other parts of the town. It was expected that the smoke would be driven through the American lines, and thereby obscure the approach of the British troops; but the wind appears to have shifted suddenly, and carried it in a contrary direction.

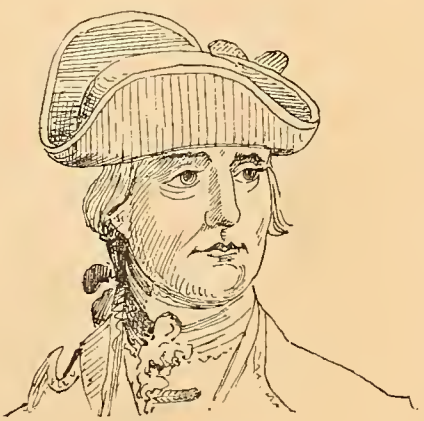
At this moment the scene was one long to be remembered. The tall genadiers in brilliant

GENERAL GAGE, COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF OF THE BRITISH ARMY.

uniform, their polished arms glistening in the mid-day sun, marching slowly but confidently up to the rudely-constructed works, behind which the ill-dressed and half-awed "rebels" stood nervously handling their antiquated muskets; the continuous roar of the heavy guns from the batteries and the ships-of-war along the shore; the crackling of the flames ascending from the burning town; the thousands of spectators gathered on the housetops and hillsides to witness a conflict which might decide the fate of a continent, — all combined to make the scene one of unequalled grandeur and importance. The impending conflict was not, on the whole, to be an unequal one. What the provincials lacked in experience and discipline, they made up, in part at least, by their superior skill as marksmen, and by their enthusiastic belief in the justice of their cause. They were behind earthworks, which, if rudely constructed, were yet sufficient to protect them against the close fire of infantry and the long-range fire of artillery. The British were superior in numbers and in the character of their arms; but the fire of their infantry was mostly thrown away, as they discharged their guns while holding them at the side, in the position of the bayonet charge. The chief advantage possessed by the British was in their artillery, which, up to this time, had not done much execution, but which was, by and by, to turn the scale in their favor. Gen. Burgoyne, who was watching the field at this time from Copp's Hill, says in a letter to Lord Stanley, "Howe's disposition was extremely soldier-like: in my opinion it was perfect." But subsequent events, on another field, showed that Burgoyne was not a good judge.

The British advance was impeded on the right by fences and tall grass, on the left by the low marshy grounds around the brickkilns. The men were much burdened by the weight of their knapsacks and arms, and by the extreme heat of the day. The engagement was begun by Pigot's forces on the left face of the redoubt, and the front of the breastwork. They fired as they advanced; but there was no response, except a few scattering shots, until they came within ten or twelve rods of the works, when there was a simultaneous discharge from the American lines, before which the front ranks went down as though blasted by an unseen power. This unequal contest was maintained for a few minutes; and then Gen. Pigot ordered his men to fall back out of range. The result was received by the Americans with cheers.

By this time the right wing was engaged at the rail-fence, and at the gap where the American artillery had been stationed. The same tactics were pursued there that had been so successful at the main works. The British were allowed to approach within easy range, and were then swept down by the fatal precision of the American fire. They wavered for an instant, and then fell back in confusion. The men behind the intrenchments could hardly be restrained by their

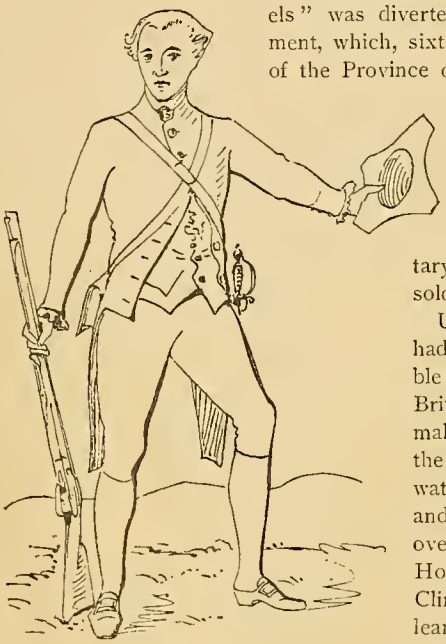


MAJOR-GENERAL HOWE.

officers from sallying out, and falling on the enemy in open field. Private Brown was more cheerful at this time, and tells his mother, that, "when the enemy came to swallow us up, they found a choaky mouthful."

The British ranks were soon re-formed. They again advanced to the attack, both on the right and left; but, although they held their ground for a time, the deadly fire from the American marksmen hurled them back a second time. The officers who formed Gen. Howe's immediate staff had all been killed or wounded; but with a noble courage he stood out defiantly conspicuous, "his silk stockings dyed with the blood of his followers," and strove to stay the retreat.

Artemus Ward



GENERAL JOSEPH WARREN.

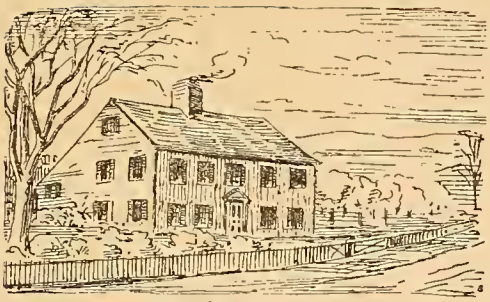
Perhaps the fire of the "rebels" was diverted from him by the remembrance of a monument, which, sixteen years before, the Great and General Court of the Province of Massachusetts Bay had caused to be placed in Westminster Abbey: "To the memory of George, Lord Viscount Howe, brigadier-general of his Majesty's forces in North America, who was slain July 6, 1758, on the march of Ticonderoga; in testimony of the sense they had of his services and military virtues, and of the affection their officers and soldiers bore to his command."

Up to this time the losses on the American side had been very small. There was now a considerable interval before the attack was renewed. The British troops were disheartened, and indisposed to make a third attempt. A small re-enforcement from the marine corps was sent over; and Clinton, watching the progress of the fight from Copp's Hill, and seeing the desperate situation of affairs, crossed over alone in a boat, and offered his services to Howe as a volunteer. Whether it was owing to Clinton's counsels, or whether the commander had learned something from his terrible experience of the previous half-hour, the next movement was more wisely planned. The artillery was ordered forward to take position in the gap between the rail-fence and the breastwork, and enfilade the right of the American lines. The infantry were ordered to lay aside their heavy equipments, advance in column instead of in line, reserve their fire until the last moment, and then scale the embankment, and use the bayonet.

John Stark

The American officers saw these preparations with a feeling that the deadliest struggle of the day was yet to come; but most of them kept a bold front, and encouraged their men with the statement that one more repulse would decide the battle. The principal danger which they had to fear was, that

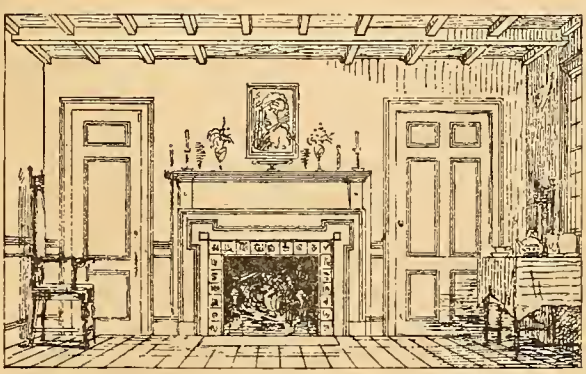
the ammunition, of which there was now a very limited supply, would give out entirely before the advance of the enemy was checked. As but few of their muskets had bayonets, they would, in that event, be powerless to resist the onset. The American artillery had been of little practical use during the day, owing to the incompetency of the officers who had charge of it. In this last encounter it bore no part.



WARREN'S BIRTHPLACE.

The weight of the attack was directed against the breastwork and the redoubt. Howe led the attack against the former; and Clinton and Pigot, against the latter. The Americans received them with a deadly volley, at twenty yards' distance; but, without returning it, the men pressed forward. At this moment the artillery succeeded in taking position at the gap, speedily drove off the defenders of the breastwork by a raking fire, and sent their balls through the sallyport into the redoubt. The British left now pressed forward on three sides of the redoubt, and began to scale the embankment. For a while it was contested with savage energy. Among the first to mount the parapet was Major Pitcairn of the marine corps, the second in command of the expedition to Concord and Lexington. It is said that he shouted, "The day is ours!" when he fell back, mortally wounded, into the arms of his son. He was shot by a colored soldier named Salem.

The Sixty-third Regiment of grenadiers claim the honor of first entering the redoubt. The defenders were now without ammunition, the powder for the last shots having been taken from artillery cartridges. Stones were used by some; muskets were clubbed; and for a brief space a hand-to-hand conflict ensued. As soon as the British had full possession of the parapet, they poured over into the interior in such numbers, and used their bayonets with such fatal effect, that Prescott saw no alternative but to order a retreat. His men escaped the best way they could, — some over the top, and others through the passageway. Prescott's "banyan" and waistcoat were pierced and rent by the British bayonets; but he escaped without bodily injury. After leaving the redoubt, the men had to fight their way through the British troops, which, having carried the breastwork, were pressing forward to form a junction with the left wing, which had swung round to the northerly side. It was at that point that they suffered the heaviest losses; and it was then that Warren fell. A ball struck him in the forehead, a few rods from the redoubt. There was a popular story, at a later day, and Trumbull perpetuated it in his great painting, that Major Small, who was in command of the last re-enforcement of marines sent from Boston, tried to save Warren's life, and that he ran to shield him when he fell; but the story was afterwards authoritatively denied. The general's body was not discovered until the following day, when Dr. Jeffries visited the grounds.



ROOM AT WATERTOWN WHERE WARREN BREAKFASTED JUNE 17, 1775.

The men at the rail-fence had not been overcome by the demonstration made against them, and they maintained their ground until the main body of their com-

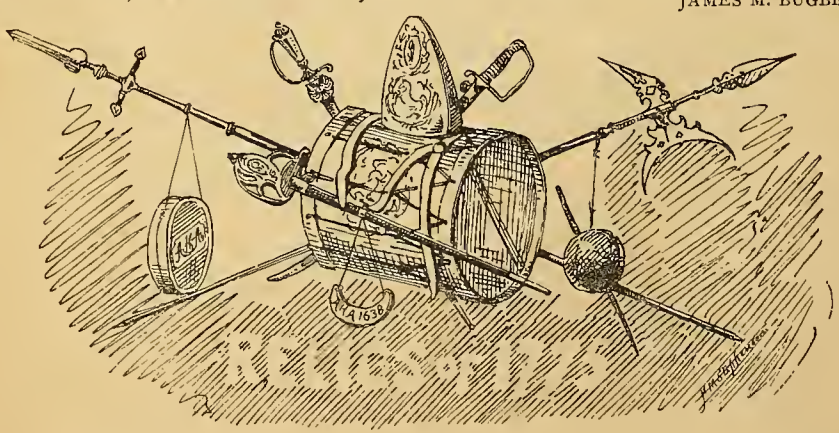
GENERAL ISRAEL PUTNAM.

rades from the redoubt and the breastwork had left the hill. "They then," says the report of the Committee of Safety, "gave ground, but with more regularity than could be expected of troops who had no longer been under discipline, and many of whom had never before seen an engagement."

Putnam appears to have assumed the general command at this time, and was conspicuous in trying to check the retreat. Riding furiously up and down among the men, he alternately threatened and entreated. It was useless, however, to attempt to make a stand in an open field which was raked by the fire of light artillery, and the guns in the river on the westerly side of the peninsula. The partial stand which was made at the brow of Bunker Hill caused a heavy loss. Clinton was for following up the blow, and attacking the headquarters at Cambridge; but a large portion of Gage's effective force had been in the fight, and had suffered such heavy losses, that they were in no condition to make an active pursuit. They took possession of Bunker Hill, and there lay on their arms during the night. Putnam collected as many of the fugitives as possible, and established himself on Prospect Hill, about a mile and a half in the rear. Of the six field-pieces carried into the fight, only one was saved. After leaving the redoubt, Col. Prescott hurried to Cambridge, and, after giving vent to his indignation at not being properly re-enforced, pressed Gen. Ward to let him have fifteen hundred men, and retake the hill. "He had not," says Col. Swett, "done enough to satisfy himself, though he had done enough to satisfy his country. He had not, indeed, secured final victory; but he had secured a glorious immortality."

From the beginning of the attack on the intrenchments, until the taking of the redoubt, only about an hour and a quarter elapsed. In that brief time, the British had lost in killed and wounded, according to Gage's report, 1,054 men. The loss in commissioned officers had been especially severe, as the Americans had "aimed at their handsome coats." One lieutenant-colonel, two majors, and seven captains were killed, and seventy other commissioned officers were wounded. The American loss, according to an exact return, was 145 killed and missing, and 304 wounded. The result was justly regarded at the time, both at home and abroad, as a substantial victory for the Americans.

JAMES M. BUGBEE.



THE CROSSED SWORDS.*

Swords crossed, — but not in strife !
The chiefs who drew them, parted by the space
Of two proud countries' quarrel, face to face
Ne'er stood for death or life.

Swords crossed, that never met
While nerve was in the hands that wielded them ;
Hands better destined a fair family stem
On those free shores to set.

Kept crossed by gentlest bands !
Emblems no more of battle, but of peace ;
And proof how loves can grow and wars can cease,
Their once stern symbol stands.

It smiled first on the array
Of marshalled books and friendliest companies ;
And here, a history among histories,
It still shall smile for aye.

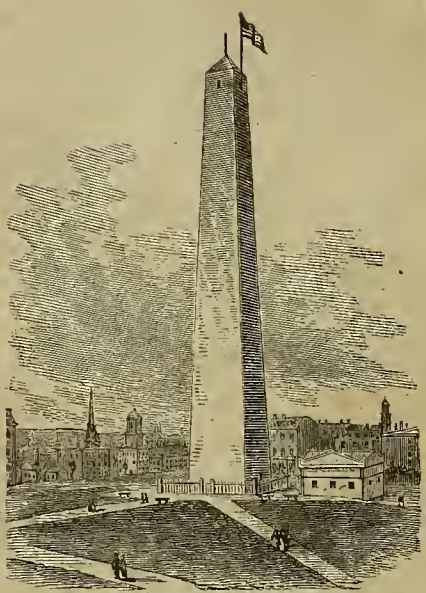
See that thou memory keep,
Of him the firm commander ; and that other,
The stainless judge ; and him our peerless brother, —
All fallen now asleep.

Yet more : a lesson teach,
To cheer the patriot-soldier in his course,
That Right shall triumph still o'er insolent Force :
That be your silent speech.

Oh, be prophetic too !
And may those nations twain, as sign and seal
Of endless amity, hang up their steel,
As we these weapons do !

The archives of the Past,
So smeared with blots of hate and bloody wrong,
Pining for peace, and sick to wait so long,
Hail this meek cross at last.

* These apt and touching lines, which are here quoted from Ticknor's " Life of W. H. Prescott," were written by the late Rev. Dr. N. L. Frothingham, on the occasion of the presentation to the Massachusetts Historical Society of the famous weapons which are represented at the top of page 5 of this brochure.



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